



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Massachusetts Celebrates Agriculture Day at the State House ***Annual "Taste of Massachusetts" reception showcases state's farm products***

BOSTON – Hundreds of farmers and representatives of agricultural organizations are expected to converge on Beacon Hill today for Massachusetts Agriculture Day at the State House, meeting with legislators to discuss farming issues and to celebrate the multi-million dollar impact agriculture has on the state's economy.

From maple sugar in the Berkshires to apple orchards on the North Shore and cranberry bogs on Cape Cod, the Massachusetts farming industry is vast and vibrant, generating over \$416 million in revenue each year. Farmers met with their state representatives and senators today to discuss the challenges they face. State officials used the opportunity to commend the agricultural industry which, in addition to its economic contribution, protects 518,000 acres of open space with over 6,000 active farms.

"Farms are a vital part of the Massachusetts landscape," said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles. "We are pleased to work with the agricultural community to sponsor this event devoted to supporting the long-term viability of such an important sector of our economy."

"Agriculture Day helps to raise awareness among legislators and the public about what agriculture has to offer Massachusetts," said Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) Commissioner Doug Petersen.

In addition to growing food and conserving open space, many Massachusetts farmers are now exploring new ways to save money and fuel through energy conservation and efficiency, Petersen noted. The DAR's Energy Program promotes knowledge and awareness while implementing energy-related projects for various agribusinesses. The program assists farmers with issues such as energy efficiency, energy conservation and renewable energy applications – reducing both farm energy costs and environmental impacts. Farmers are also exploring and using alternative energy technologies such as wind, solar, and biodiesel.

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Adding to the festivities was a spread of farm and specialty foods as part of the annual “Taste of Massachusetts.” Grower organizations showcased everything from maple syrup and cheese to shellfish and cranberry juice, as hundreds enjoyed the homegrown fare.

Recognition at today’s event went to Emma Daly of Dracut, who earned honors for growing the best cabbage in Massachusetts, as part of the Alabama-based Bonnie Plants yearly cabbage contest. Bonnie Plants provides the seeds and then challenges students to grow a strong, viable cabbage in exchange for a winning ribbon and \$1,000 scholarship. Agricultural officials also recognized Megan Teixeira of Fall River, who represented the Massachusetts 4-H program, of which she is an active member.

Sponsored by the DAR and the Massachusetts Agricultural Promotion Board, Massachusetts Agriculture Day also included the presentation of the Agriculture Day Awards, which went to state Representatives Anne Gobi and Dennis Guyer, as well as columnist and radio personality Paul Rogers.

Also expected to attend were Senator Pam Resor and Representative Frank Smizik, co-chairs of the Joint Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture.

DAR took the opportunity to kick off the 2008 Massachusetts Agriculture Calendar Photo Contest. Photographers, amateurs and everyone in between are encouraged to snap photos that capture the beauty of Massachusetts agriculture in its changing seasons. The deadline for submissions is June 1. Winning photos will be published in the 2009 calendar. For more information on the contest, go to www.mass.gov/massgrown.

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